

## **The glass cliff effect for women in STEM**

A recent Editorial in *The Lancet* (Feb 10, p 513)<sup>1</sup> promotes gender equity in science as both a moral and necessary imperative. A US national survey<sup>2</sup> has identified science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) workplaces as “deeply misogynistic”.<sup>1</sup> In the UK and Australia, schemes, such as the Athena SWAN Charter have also shown that STEM work places cannot be gender inclusive without institutional commitment to removing unconscious bias.<sup>3</sup> Medicine is one STEM discipline in which gender balance already exists at the undergraduate level; however, Janet Pope’s Comment in the same issue of *The Lancet*<sup>4</sup> emphasised that this gender balance is not reflected at the leadership level.

Both Pope and *The Lancet* agree that the “leaky pipeline”<sup>1</sup> needs to be fixed to prevent wasted talent. Pope also offers practical advice to help women progress up the ladder into senior roles. But what has not been discussed in either piece is what happens once women break through the glass ceiling in a male-dominated STEM speciality. As senior STEM academics, we would argue that thought should also be given to understanding what happens next. Studies in other professions indicate the existence of a “glass cliff” effect,<sup>5</sup> with women reported to more easily fall from a position of leadership because of a single mistake than a man in the same position. We are in the process of exploring whether this unconscious bias applies to women in transplant leadership roles.<sup>6</sup> Our initial findings suggest the presence of a subtle rather than overt glass cliff effect in this field.

We declare no competing interests.

1. *The Lancet*. Year of reckoning for women in science. *Lancet* 2018; 391: 513.

2 Funk C, Parker K. Women and men in STEM often at odds over workplace equity. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, Jan 9, 2018.

3 The Royal Society. Unconscious bias. The Royal Society, 2015. <https://royalsociety.org/~media/policy/Publications/2015/unconsciousbias-briefing-2015.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2018).

4. Pope JE. Mentoring women in medicine: a personal perspective. *Lancet* 2018; 391: 520–21.

5 Brescoll VL, Dawson E, Uhlmann EL. Hard won and easily lost: the fragile status of leaders in gender-stereotype-incongruent occupation. *Psychol Sci* 2010; 21: 1640–42.

6 Krishnan N, Biggerstaff D, Raymond N, et al. Are women in transplant leadership roles judged more harshly than their male colleagues? *Transplantation* 2016; 100 (suppl 7): S159.

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